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## Remarks on the Direct Method of Teaching German.\*

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“Ich weiss es, der Mensch soll  
Immer streben zum Bessern; und, wie wir sehen, er strebt auch  
Immer dem Höheren nach, zum wenigsten sucht er das Neue.  
Aber geht nicht zu weit! Denn neben diesen Gefühlen  
Gab die Natur uns auch die Lust zu verharren im Alten,  
Und sich dessen zu freuen, was jeder lange gewohnt ist.”

One of the most interesting tendencies of recent years is the forced recognition of contemporary thought, and especially in College circles. Why the men at the head of many of the departments in the lines of literature persist in remaining years behind the times seems almost unexplainable. Instead of opening the eyes of their students to the truths which fill the very atmosphere they inhale, they are busy as beavers in endeavoring to dam the irresistible current of development. This is especially true in the field of modern language, and we of the Germanic faith are not without sins of commission and omission.

Under the present condition it is impossible to have any definite goal towards which we should labor. The German born and educated will of necessity be imbued with ideals which the average American can not understand and which sometimes are in direct opposition to the customs of certain communities. These ideals meet a stubborn resistance, for nothing is so obstinate as prejudice based on ignorance. The natural result is that the community goes to the opposite extreme and endeavors to block every thing that might savor of German ideals. And this is fatal to the development of the community. Either German is not taught at all or taught in order to fill the paper requirements of the colleges by a teacher who is absolutely ignorant of any phase of her subject, or by a teacher who can do nothing more than drill set paradigms and listen patiently to a so-called translation.

And here is the point where many College teachers are fault. Because they, under the pretence of conservation or for the sake of self-preservation, foster the petrified traditions and continue to bring forth generation after generation of fossilized teachers. No wonder that a Tolstoi has stated that the primary fault of our education is that the teachers are dead before they begin to teach. On the other side we have a diversified confusion of natural methods which are intended to

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\*) This paper, which might be entitled „Eine Kombination der Überlieferung“, is merely an abstract of a plan, the execution of which is being rendered difficult by the accumulation of material.

bring forth immediate results, a condition of affairs just as deplorable as the first mentioned. The entire object of these methods is a superficial smattering of a few daily phrases.

Such are the two extremes which you will meet in visiting our schools. And between these extremes you will find various phases. The great problem is where should the center of gravity be. First of all we must catch the main current of education.

No one can deny that the primary object of education is to develop the power of thinking. Accordingly our entire forces should be directed to give to the youth that equipment which will best prepare him for independent development in after life. In our field the ultimate end should be broad humanistic literary interpretation, and all our endeavors should center upon this goal.

The problem then is how can we lay the strongest foundation for literary interpretation? What are the most certain methods? And here we are divided. However all agree that we must awaken feeling for the language before the literature can be understood. In recent years, as you have heard and read, a great reaction has taken place in the teaching of modern languages, due mostly to the commercial demands of the times, and we see a tendency which is a great progress in the methods of instruction. The instructing must be done in German to accomplish the crying needs. It is not my purpose to repeat the advantages of this method in giving the student the best working vocabulary and a practical control of the essentials of the grammar.

I wish to go one step farther in the carrying out of this method of instruction and emphasize the importance of the direct method in literary instruction. I do not pretend to give you any fixed results. That would mean that the method had become wooden. Nor do I claim to bring any definite original method, as that would be dishonest and would indicate an ignorance of the history of pedagogy and of the tendencies in Germany and America. I desire to give a few of my sources before mentioning my plan.

In Luther's pamphlet "von Schulen" we find the following: When the scholars have learned to read certain beginning material — — "So sie dis können, sol man jnen den Donat vnd Cato zusammen fürgeben. Den Donat zu lesen. Den Cato zu exponiren. Also; das der Schulmeister einen vers odder zween exponire, Welche die kinder darnach zu einer andern stunde auff sagen, das sie dadurch eynen hauffen Lateinischer wort lernen vnd einen vorrat schaffen zu reden. Darinnen sollen sie geübet werden so lange, bis sie wol lesen können.—Daneben sol man sie leren schreiben vnd treiben, das sie teglich jre schrifft dem Schulmeister zeigen. — Damit sie auch viel Lateinischer wort lernen, sol man jnen teglichs am abent etliche wörter zu lernen fürgeben, wie vor alter diese weise

inn der Schulen gewest ist." They progress from book to book. The daily home work is increased to "einen Sentenz aus einem Poeten odder andern (Meister), den sie morgens wider aufsagen". Along with the reading "sol der Preceptor etliche nomina vnd verba decliniren — vnd fragen auch die kinder die regel vnd vrsach solcher declination.—Wenn auch die kinder haben regulas constructionum gelernet, sol man auff diese stunde fodern, das sie, wie mans nennet, Construirn, Welchs seer fruchtbar ist vnd doch von wenigen geübet wird." As they proceed from text to text Luther insists on grammar drill "Denn wo solchs nicht geschicht, ist alles lernen verloren vnd vergeblich." — „Es sollen auch die kinder solche regulas Grammatice auswendig aufsagen, das sie gedrungen vnd getrieben werden, die Grammatica wol zu lernen." Luther would dismiss all teachers who neglect this work. As the scholar progresses he increases the outside work and assigns psalms to be learned, as many of us assign poems. Finally Luther requires the scholars to prepare original work, as letters or verses — "Denn die selb vbung ist seer fruchtbar, anderer schrifft zuuerstehen. Machet auch die knaben reich an worten vnd zu vielen sachen geschickt." He closes by saying — — "Es sollen auch die knaben dazu gehalten werden, das sie Latinisch reden. Vnd die Schulmeister sollen selbs, so viel möglich, nichts denn Latinisch mit den knaben reden, dadurch sie auch zu solcher vbung gewonet vnd gereitzt werden."

Such are the principles which the great linguistic master has established. But in spite of these truths proclaimed centuries ago, the modern language teachers have too often travelled in the olden rut. One may say even in this connection — "Luther, du grosser verkannter Mann!"

Lessing, in various letters, has mentioned the impossibility of translating until one has acquired the power "dem Originale nachzudenken". But in spite of this impossibility one sees High School teachers encouraging their scholars to translate "Hermann und Dorothea" and College professors listening to an "aufsagen" of miserable attempts. Schiller has given us an insight into his method of work when speaking of his translation of Virgil in a letter to Körner, April 10, 1791. — "Es ist aber beinahe Originalarbeit, weil man nicht nur den lateinischen Text neu eintheilen muss, um für jede Stanze ein kleines Ganze daraus zu erhalten, sondern weil es durchaus nöthig ist dem Dichter im Deutschen von einer andern Seite wiederzugeben, was von der einen unvermeidlich verloren geht." Goethe has in numerous places expressed his method of studying literature and languages: "Lesen, Exponiren, Grammatik, Aufsagen, Hersagen von Wörtern dauerten selten eine völlige halbe Stunde; denn ich fing sogleich an, auf den Sinn der Sache loszugehen."—He sought for "den Zusammenhang, denn darauf

kommt doch eigentlich alles an."—"Wie das zugehe: war jetzt mein Anliegen."—"Ich studirete das Stück ganz in mich hinein, ergriff alle Rollen und lernte sie auswendig — —" etc., etc.

The more I began to investigate the more I discovered that all the great poets and thinkers cherished the same thoughts. If then this is the process of the leaders of literature, why should not the teachers of literature profit by their example? This was the question which naturally asserted itself.

I started to combine the fundamental thoughts of the modern methods with the processes of our great teachers and poets. This combination of the Überlieferung with the present tendencies has no limit but grows and grows. It involves unceasing labor, but so does everything which bears results. "Wo auch den Schulmeister solcher arbeit verdreuset, wie man viel findet, sol man dieselbigen lassen lauffen vnd einen andern suchen der sich dieser arbeit anneme."

The problem of material is a very difficult one. Material must be selected which will give the best foundation for all possible demands, whether they be commercial or literary. At the same time this material must at least correspond to the development of the scholar's mind and not be too difficult to grasp in a foreign language. And here again I followed the private examples of our best scholars of German literature and introduced the German Bible. No one can deny that the German Bible is the font from which all German poets from Luther to Gustav Frenssen have drawn inspiration. Luther's greatest work is more potent today in Germany than ever before. In a short time the scholars can acquire a large vocabulary and a fund of the greatest thoughts which man has ever received. On this foundation they can base their future work. The scholars can begin to read at the very first, or as soon as they have studied the verbs. I know that we must overcome a mountain of prejudice, but the tendency towards a broader conception is evident, and it is our duty to assist in this great work. Our country is beginning to realize that moral strength depends upon broad education. Therefore to deprive the youth of the country of his educational right is to undermine his moral development.

With this equipment the scholar can enter the study of literature corresponding to his age and tastes. The problem of material again asserts itself. I would select modern literature, which to a certain extent reflects the German customs. Upon this one can base the conversation exercises. In this way neither side of the present demands would be neglected.

Then I would select texts which gradually lead up to the Classics, as l'Arrabiata, Riehl's Kulturgeschichtliche Novellen, Burg Neideck, for example. By the time the student has reached the classics he has

obtained a fair working vocabulary, provided the teacher has insisted upon the use of German from the very beginning. Of course his German is not without mistakes in the very essentials, but infinitely better than according to the old ways of instruction.

Then I would take up the Classics, but along with the Classics I would have the scholars read some of the modern dramas so that they could notice the trend of the development in this line, laying especial stress upon the social condition as reflected in the literature. This gives an excellent opportunity for talks in simple German on German life and thought.

The problem of the application of the direct method to literature is a most difficult one, and each teacher will have his own particular solution. However, if one follows the methods of Luther, Lessing, and Goethe he must obtain results. The students should prepare the lessons, even from the very beginning, so as to be able to recite without the books. This plan at once offsets the objection which may truthfully be made to the usual application of the direct method — loose preparation. This plan requires the most accurate preparation and is not easy, but the German language is not a simple one and can not be learned by dwelling on kindergarten or nursery methods. Two objections have been raised to this plan — First, a student is not able to read so many pages as according to the translation method. Let Luther answer “dann viel bücher machen nit geleret, vil lesen auch nit, sondern gut ding und oft lesen, wie wenig sein ist, das machet geleret in der schrift”. Second it is mechanical: this objection is more apparent than real. It is true, that the learning of any language is mechanical and slow at first, but all accurate foundation is of slow growth. I always feel tempted to ask a translation man — “why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”

I will outline in short the general plan used with the last book we read in the first year class—*l’Arrabbiata*—First the scholars read the book to obtain the outline—then they read the book again with more accurate study. — Then we took each character separately (in the first readings the scholars checked in the margin of the book the passages referring to the different characters, so that when they glanced through the book it was easy to collect the material for study). They began to see the relations. They next took up general episodes and topics. We reviewed the book again, but this time the scholars conducted the recitations by asking questions to bring out the story—this was repeated. (In order to further this study a guide was published which was later included in an edition of this book. A similar guide to *Burg Neideck* is published by Wahr of Ann Arbor.) Along with this they had a rigid grammar drill.

I may add that a few of the weak students could not entirely grasp the plan, due mostly to the fact that they had never tried to remember the contents of a book, but the work of the class as a whole was a valuable lesson to them.

The principal advantages of this plan are: the scholar has acquired a working vocabulary of words, idioms and phrases; has become freed from incessant use of the dictionary; has started to ascertain the meaning of words from the context, and has been compelled to remember the thoughts of the book — in short has learned to read a book directly.

The work on the dramas is along the same general lines, only more stress is put on the development. Take *Egmont* for example. The students learn the exposition nearly by heart, as they should in studying any drama. It is absolutely necessary to master the exposition before one can appreciate the work of the poet. However commonplace such a remark may sound, this factor is almost always neglected, judging from the preparation of the students. Doubtless some teachers have told their students this a dozen times, and they may have written learned lectures on the nature of the drama, according to out-of-date theories, but they have never taken their students to the sources for independent study. Perhaps they have led them like horses to water and have tried to make them drink, but either the students were not thirsty, or the water had lost its savor by standing in the old trough, or was made roily by foreign substances.

The fact remains that the students must learn the exposition and they must learn it directly. First of all we must remember what Goethe said of the teacher "his only task is to awaken feeling". This can not be done by translation or by explanation. The student must first learn what is contained in the exposition before any explanation will be understood. Or the most he can possibly do is to accept what the teacher dictates — "friss Vogel, oder stirb!"

The entire first scene should be read, then re-read so as to obtain the "Zusammenhang". Then each character should be studied. The surest plan is to have the students copy the speeches of each character so as to have the material all together. Then they can obtain a clearer conception of the characters. If they once understand the characters they can remember better what each one will say under the circumstances which may arise. They will also catch the "Stimmung," of the scene. Then topics should be assigned, as *Regierung*, *Religion*, *Krieg*; these may be subdivided, e. g. under *Religion* — *Bischöfe*, *Psalmen*, *Inquisition*, *die neuen Prediger*. Then have the students collect what is said about *Margarete*, *Oranien*, and finally *Egmont*. By this time they have learned the scene without committing it. The students are prepared to proceed to the next scene. (In the meantime have the class read ahead as far as

possible). The second scene is studied in the same manner. Material for the different topics is continually added, and especially material on the characters, above all on Egmont. Then the connecting threads of the scene are studied, e. g. in the first scene Soest mentions the kind of rulers the people wish — Machiavell does the same thing. The Bischöfe are referred to in both scenes. In the first scene Oranien and Egmont are mentioned separately, in the second they are brought together. The opinion of the people in regard to Egmont is repeated, etc. etc. And so they proceed in the study of the drama.

When they have finished the drama they study different groups of scenes, as the bürger-scenes, the regent-scenes etc. Gradually the student begins to see "dass es ist mit der Gedankenfabrik, wie mit einem Webermeisterstück, wo ein Tritt tausend Fäden regt, die Schiffelein herüber, hinüber schießen, die Fäden ungesehen fließen, ein Schlag tausend Verbindungen schlägt." Er hat nicht nur die Teile in seiner Hand sondern auch sogar das geistige Band. And Egmont is to him not a series of disconnected scenes, but a living drama which knows but one fundamental law — the unity of the development of human life.

But such interpretation must rest upon a living basis, and this basis is the direct method in the broadest meaning of the word. The students slowly but surely gain an appreciation of the German language and literature. As they proceed from play to play, from author to author, from period to period they can review the "zurückgelegten Weg", and if they turn around they have an "Aussicht". They have been initiated into the most essential of all, namely into the evolution of thought.

At first the teacher may make mistakes. But every successful man learns more from his mistakes than from his passive virtues, more from practice than from theoretical study. That which in the distance seemed to be a steep road is but an interesting slope. If you become discouraged, the pleasure of climbing higher will refreshen you. Back of all you have a living growing method which enlivens the man and thus the teacher and then the class. The life of the class will reflect. Along with practical drill in paradigm and syntax with live composition you have awakened the students to search directly for the thoughts underlying the words, and that is the ultimate aim of all instruction. Von dem Erziehungsrecht, das mit den Schülern geboren, ist die Rede.